



VOICES & VISIONS

JULY/AUGUST 2004

SECTION C

Southeast Conference Builds Community Amid Diversity

2004 Annual Meeting Held at Piedmont College

by Joyce Hollyday

Piedmont College in Demorest, Georgia, was humming with activity during the Southeast Conference's Annual Meeting held June 11-12. Classical strains from the chapel's grand pipe organ summoned us to our opening worship Friday night, and the smooth melodies of a local bluegrass band sent us on our way home Saturday afternoon. In between, we were treated to the beautifully blended voices of the college's Cantabile, the lively liturgical dance of the PC Steppers, and the uplifting hymns of the Annual Meeting choir, anchored by voices from across the Southeast Conference. Background for it all was a soundtrack that included the squeals of delighted children racing through the college's corridors and up and down its hills, the animated buzz of youth enjoying one another, and the constant conversation of adults

reuniting during yet another outstanding Annual Meeting.

Our preachers for the weekend were Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor and Rev. Dwight Andrews. Sharing from



06-12



the Nehemiah 4 text ("The people have a mind to build"), which has become a motto of the Conference, both of these renowned preachers challenged and inspired us to keep building up our relationships, our mission, and our hope. As is our tradition, we lifted up the names of the saints from

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Southeast Conference Event Begins Fundraising for General Synod XXV

When General Synod comes to Atlanta in July 2005, over a thousand people will experience the vitality and hospitality of the Southeast Conference, one of the smallest but among the most dynamic conferences in the United Church of Christ. General Synod 2005 will be an opportunity for the whole church to experience genuine Southern hospitality at its best.

In the first of many fundraising efforts to help offset the costs of the Synod to the local conference, members of the Southeast Conference were invited to a special dinner at the Omni Hotel in Atlanta on Wednesday, April 21, 2004. Dr. Timothy Downs, Conference Minister of the Southeast Conference, welcomed all present, including members of the conference and members of the Collegium, the body made up of the heads of the Covenanted Ministries of the national office. Dr.

Downs introduced the featured speaker, Dr. John Thomas, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, who spoke about the prophetic role of the United Church of Christ in facing injustice and promoting peace. Entertainment for the evening was provided by a jazz ensemble organized by Rev. Dr. Dwight Andrews, Pastor of First Congregational Church, UCC, in Atlanta.

Other Collegium members in attendance included Ms. Edith Guffey, Associate General Minister; Ms. Bernice



An Atlanta Jazz Trio led by Rev. Dwight Andrews entertained attendees.



Attendees enjoy fellowship and entertainment outside the Omni Hotel.

Powell Jackson, Executive Minister of Justice and Witness Ministries; Rev. Jose Malayang, Executive Minister of Local Church Ministries; and Ms. Olivia White, who was installed this same weekend as Executive Director of Wider Church Ministries in a service at First Congregational UCC in Atlanta. Dr. Downs also introduced the co-chairs of the Local Arrangements Committee for General Synod XXV, Rev. Bennie Liggins, pastor of Community Congregational UCC in Montgomery, Alabama, and Dr. Desiree Pedescaleaux-Andrews of First Congregational UCC in Atlanta.

According to Rev. Liggins, who was accompanied by several members of Community Congregational UCC, the evening not only raised money, it raised

awareness of the scope of the mission of the UCC. "Members of my church sat at the table with Bernice Powell Jackson and learned about the work of Justice and Witness Ministries and to experience the wider church. We learned more about who we are (as members of the United Church of Christ) and what we are about." According to Rev. Liggins, attendance at the dinner helped his congregants experience a greater sense of "ownership" of the General Synod and has reinforced OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission) giving in their church.

Ticket sales and donations for the dinner raised \$8000.00 toward the \$20,000 the local conference is expected to raise to offset the cost of General Synod XXV. To inquire about how your congregation can assist in fundraising for General Synod, contact Tim Downs at tdowns@secucc.org or call the Southeast Conference office.

"I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT UPON ALL... AND YOUR YOUNG SHALL SEE VISION AND YOUR OLD SHALL DREAM DREAMS."

ACTS 2:17

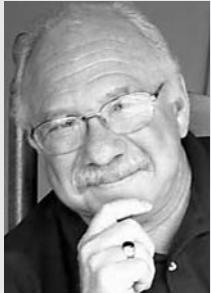


How are We, *Really*?

Dear Friends,

I write this letter in the afterglow of another wonderful Annual Meeting of the Southeast Conference so graciously hosted by Piedmont College on June 11-12. The TAP Convocation through which we engaged the issues of how to be transformational communities, the wonderful fellowship that always marks our gatherings,

**FROM THE
CONFERENCE
MINISTER**



business meeting, are all evidence of a faithful and alive Conference.

On the floor of the business meeting during a particularly lively conversation, one person stood and asked, "What's going on here, *really*?" I was reminded of that moment in my recent emergency visit to the hospital when people looked

me in the eye and asked with great gravity, "How are you feeling, *really*?" How is the Southeast Conference feeling, *really*?

Here is the beginning of an answer. In the last eight years the giving from local churches to OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission) Basic Support has increased 60% to \$250,000 annually. Our budget in the same time has more than doubled, to almost \$600,000. We have successfully started eight new churches and received three established churches into the United Church of Christ. With this activity, we have doubled our membership from approximately 6000 to 12000 members.

All of this growth has enabled us to revitalize our mission and ministries in exciting ways. We have more than doubled our contributions to support the mission and ministry of the national United Church of Christ. We have dramatically increased our contacts with local churches through our incredibly gifted Conference staff. We have discovered numerous new ways to assist churches in

the revitalization of their ministries, not the least of which are our youth ministries and the TAP program which currently

has over 50 participants in seven classes. The congregations which

were part of our Rekindle the Gift program are entering new phases of renewal in consultation with Conference staff. And not insignificantly, in the coming year the Southeast Conference will host not only the General Synod XXV in July, 2005, but a national UCC evangelism event and the national UCC youth event..

I have no doubt that this dramatic season of growth will continue over the next eight years. But with growth in the life of a Conference there inevitably come tensions and points of resistance to growth and change. People look around and think to themselves, "I used to know everybody at our gatherings and now I don't." Others see the changes and think to themselves, "This makes me uncomfortable and I liked how it used to be." These tensions are an inevitable part of change and sometimes in business meet-

ings we see these tensions expressed.

Nonetheless, I am confident that God has called the Southeast Conference to be God's people in a new way in this time and place. I know that the Southeast Conference is making a difference not only in the lives of its members across the Southeast but indeed in the lives of the cities and towns of our region. We are people who are called to proclaim a word of wholeness and healing in the midst of brokenness, to proclaim a word of reconciliation in the midst of rancor and anger, and a word of justice in the midst of injustice and inequity.

So, "**How are we, really?**" We are *really* doing well! In a time when voices around us declare that "mainline" denominations have become the "side-line," we have become "in line" with the Gospel, finding our voice as an alternative theological and scriptural presence in this region in the name of Jesus Christ who redeems, reconciles, and makes new all things.

Peace,
Timothy C. Downs
Conference Minister

CONCERNs AND CELEBRATIONS

OUR SYMPATHY

Robert R. Liggins, father of Bennie Liggins, died on May 12, 2004. Bennie is the Associate Conference Minister for New Church Development and Evangelism and Pastor of Community Congregational Church UCC in Montgomery, AL.

Dee Sanders's mother died in Beaumont, TX on June 20, 2004. Dee is the wife of Toby Sanders, a candidate approved for ordination by the Georgia-South Carolina Association, and a member of GSN Ministries, UCC, in Atlanta, GA.

Marty Brown, the drummer at Beloved Community UCC in Birmingham, AL, died unexpectedly. Marty was a charter member of the congregation and brother of the Director of Music, LeNard Brown.

Marlene Underwood, a student in care who is teaching and assisting at GSN Ministries, UCC, in Atlanta, recently learned of the tragic death of her cousin and his two sons in Wisconsin.

Lilly Ruth Johnson, mother of Artis Johnson, died in June 2004. Artis is pastor of Evergreen Congregational Church, UCC, in Beachton, GA.

OUR CONCERNs

Barbara Brogan, mother of Lesley Brogan, Minister of Community and Belonging at Central Congregational Church, UCC, Atlanta, had surgery on July 7th to

remove a portion of her lung due to cancer and reports a good prognosis.

OUR CELEBRATIONS

Da Vita McCallister was ordained on June 27, 2004 at First Congregational Church UCC in Atlanta, GA where she serves as Minister for Youth. She will also serve as Director of the UCC PLSE program at the Fund for Theological Education.

TJ McGiffert was ordained at Virginia Highland church (A Baptist and UCC Congregation) in Atlanta, GA on July 11, 2004. TJ will serve on the staff of Virginia-Highland Church.

Ken Samuel, Pastor and Founder of Victory Church UCC in Stone Mountain, GA, received the Bishop Yvette Flunder Award for Excellence in Ministry at a banquet held in his honor on June 19, 2004.

Congratulations to those who were elected as members and officers of the Southeast Conference Board of Directors. Officers include Dorothy Gager, Moderator (Howard Congregational UCC, Nashville); Da Vita McCallister, Vice-Moderator (First Congregational UCC, Atlanta); Jim Crabb, Treasurer (Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta); and Michael Lomax, Chair of Finance Committee (First Congregational Church, UCC, Atlanta). New Board members include: Herb Horton (Sankofa UCC, Atlanta), Tom Baird (Church of

the Savior UCC, Knoxville, TN), and Johnny Pruitt (Community Congregational UCC, Montgomery, AL).

MINISTRY TRANSITIONS

Cameron Trimble was called to the position of Minister for Children and Youth at Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta, GA. Cameron is a member of Pilgrimage UCC in Marietta and a graduate of Candler School of Theology. She will be seeking ministerial standing in the UCC.

John Clay Buck, Executive Director of Uplands Retirement Community since 1987, retired in June. During his tenure, the Uplands Community saw many significant expansions, including the doubling of its corporate value to \$10 million. John also recently served as the Chair of the Council on Health and Human Services of the UCC. His vision and leadership will be both celebrated and missed.

Linda Magyar was called as Pastor of First United Church, UCC in Nashville, TN. Linda comes to us from Penn Northeast Conference where she served as an interim minister.

Our thanks to Ginnie Ferrell who resigned her position as Minister for Children and Youth at Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta. Ginnie and her husband Jack will continue to live in the Atlanta area.

VOICES & VISIONS

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Southeast Conference Builds Community Amid Diversity

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each of our congregations who entered eternal rest during the past year. And during our time of recognizing ordination anniversaries, we gave special tribute to

Ed Brown for sixty years of ministry and our Conference Minister Tim Downs for thirty years. Ed gave testimony to his faithful work for racial reconciliation and building up churches, and the Conference staff sang an original hymn for Tim titled "Relentless, Unflappable, Tim You Are Wise,"

to the tune of "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise."

A clergy reception, ice cream social, and contra dance were part of Friday's activities. Hans Holznagel of the national office of the United Church of Christ brought greetings and encouragement as the Conference looks toward hosting General Synod XXV in Atlanta next summer. We ended our Annual Meeting by sharing a picnic lunch indoors, serenaded by the bluegrass band. We give

thanks to our friends at Piedmont College, who worked very hard and hosted us in warm and gracious style.

Joyce Hollyday is Associate Conference Minister for the Southeast Conference and may be contacted at jhollyday@bellsouth.net.



A Reflection on Diversity in Worship

by Kimberleigh Buchanan

At last month's Annual Meeting of the Southeast Conference, we had two worship services. Over the course of the two services, we heard a diverse range of music – an a capella ensemble sang an anthem by British composer John Rutter; an interracial rhythmic gospel trio tap danced, clapped, and sang "This Little Light of Mine;" a black gospel choir sang contemporary versions of gospel songs to taped accompaniment (one of which inspired some among us to dance "the electric slide" in our seats), and another small ensemble sang words by African American theologian Howard Thurman set to the music of a Mozart anthem.

Never have I experienced so wide a diversity of musical styles in so small a number of worship services. And never have I worshiped so deeply. Preacher Dwight Andrews, jazz musician and pastor at First Congregational UCC in Atlanta challenged those present not simply to tolerate our diversity, but to celebrate it. When I saw my white brothers and sisters trying desperately to clap on beats 2 and 4 and to sway in time with the gospel choir, and when I saw the gospel choir stand and applaud the Mozart, I knew that we were coming close to living into Rev. Andrews' vision. In that chapel on Piedmont College's campus, we were indeed celebrating our diversity.

Why celebrate a diversity of musical styles? Why not pick one style of music and stick with it? Because, as Rev. Andrews reminded us at the Annual Meeting, if we simply tolerate diversity—musical or otherwise—we have done nothing, nothing for God's kin-dom. Experiencing different musical styles is one small way of learning to appreciate—and eventually to celebrate—the wonderful diversity among God's children.

Rev. Kimberleigh Buchanan is Pastor of Pilgrimage United Church of Christ in Marietta, GA and may be contacted at kimberleigh_allen@yahoo.com



Leadership Forum

Exploring Ministry Issues in the Southeast Conference

by Kim Hunt

In today's society, our denomination has many small churches that are unable to support a full-time pastor. The wider Church and local Church and Ministry Committees must be concerned with equipping people for ministry in those churches without requiring them to take on significant financial debt which their salaries in small churches would never allow them to repay. In addition, the ages and life circumstances of some prospective candidates for ministry may prohibit them from leaving home to attend seminary. Faithfully and creatively discerning alternative avenues to ordination was the focus of a discussion held at Central Congregational Church in Atlanta on May 15. Representatives from the Church and Ministry Committees throughout the Southeast Conference met with national staff member Rev. Lynn Bunjak, Minister for Vocation and Formation of the Parish Life and Leadership Team of Local Church Ministries, and Rev. Kathy Clark, Associate Conference Minister and Director of the Theology Among the People (TAP) program of the Southeast Conference.

Rev. Bunjak directed our attention to the guidelines for ordination found in the Manual on Ministry. We talked about how we assess candidates for ordination in our committees based on criteria listed in "The Church's Expectations of Its Candidates for Ministry." In assessing a candidate for ordination who has not attained a seminary degree, Church and Ministry members would have to be diligent in assessing that candidate's competency in the knowledge component of the guidelines. Candidates would need to be examined in areas such as Biblical interpretation, Church history, Christian ethics, and others, and the committee could require additional courses or study in areas found to be weak.

Rev. Kathy Clark gave an excellent presentation on the Theology Among the People program (TAP) and noted that some of the courses may one day be transferable into seminaries for credit. As some of the knowledge and skills required to meet the guidelines for ordination may be obtained in the TAP program, we discussed ways in which TAP may serve as one of many components combined in a preparation process.

Rev. Bunjak presented some case studies to provoke our thinking about the needs that exist in our churches and about what paths to ordination might be acceptable. Some of the issues involved in meeting the needs of the Church include recognizing pastors who come into this denomination with their congregations, especially those coming in with congregations from other cultures, worshipping in other languages. It is also important to be aware of the ethos of some rural communities which may prevent them from being comfortable with someone coming from outside - some small rural communities are best served by raising up one person or a team to serve them from within their community.

Rev. Bunjak also emphasized the importance of raising UCC identity among all of our newly ordained, licensed or privilege of call pastors. Even pastors who are seminary trained may come to us from other traditions, or they may not have experienced a strong sense of the UCC in their seminaries. She stressed that the discernment process, no matter the path, would remain long, though that time may not be spent in college and then seminary but may be spent in study and licensed ministry while pursuing another career at the same time. Significant time is needed to discern call, prepare for ministry, and gain experiential knowledge of the UCC.

Rev. Bunjak continually affirmed that Church and Ministry committees would be making the decisions regarding which path is most appropriate for an individual, and that all such decisions must hinge primarily on the needs of the Church rather than the needs or desires of the individual. The goal must always be to equip people in a reasonable way to be able to serve our churches, not to give them a chance to avoid seminary. The proposal is not one which lists acceptable paths to ordination and offers the menu to a prospective candidate. It is one in which Church and Ministry Committees are given more flexibility in assessing fitness for ministry based on the Manual on Ministry.

Kim Hunt is a member of Pilgrim Congregational United Church of Christ in Chattanooga, TN. For information about the Ministry Issues Project, visit the national UCC web site at www.ucc.org/ministers/mip/.

letter *from the Moderator* Happy New Year!

by Dorothy Gager

Happy New Year! In the Southeast Conference, we celebrate all sorts of New Years. There's the first Sunday in Advent which begins the church calendar; there's the first of January which begins our financial year as well as the new calendar year; and there's the end of the Conference Annual Meeting which marks the beginning of a new program year.

We have a wonderful staff, and this year's Board of Directors combines lots of experience with the enthusiasm of newly elected members. Please note the complete list of this year's Board of Directors, printed with this column. I hope you will keep it so you can be in touch with any of us with any concerns or bright ideas that you might have.

This will be an especially busy year for everyone as we prepare to serve as host Conference for General Synod XXV to be held in Atlanta on July 1-5, 2005. I have spent my whole life as a member of the UCC in the Southeast Conference, and I thought I knew something about the denomination. As a seminarian I had attended meetings of the old Board of Homeland Ministries and had studied UCC history and polity. None of that prepared me for the experience of attending General Synod! I had the honor of being a delegate in 1997 and 1999—what an amazing experience!

First of all, it was exciting just to see so many UCC folks in one place. And what wonderfully friendly and diverse people!

Even the business sessions were interesting, the exhibit hall contained hundreds of fascinating displays and shopping opportunities, and the worship services were joyful and deeply moving.

I hope that each congregation will begin making plans to bring as many members as possible, for the entire event or for just one day. There is a greatly reduced registration fee for members of the Southeast Conference. In addition, there will be many volunteer opportunities for parishioners throughout the Conference. Because of all the work involved with General Synod next year, we will not hold a regular Annual Meeting but will schedule a business session in Atlanta in coordination with the Synod schedule.

Meanwhile, all of the usual ministries of the Southeast Conference will continue to grow and flourish with the incredible team of staff and volunteers working on your behalf to do what God calls us to do in this coming year. It is indeed a happy new program year for the Southeast Conference!

Dorothy Gager, M.Div., LCSW, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker for the Vanderbilt Institute for Treatment of Addiction and has served as chaplain there for over 13 years. She is a member of Howard UCC in Nashville, TN and currently serves as Chair of the Board of Directors and Moderator for the Southeast Conference. She may be contacted at dorothy.gager@vanderbilt.edu.

Southeast Conference

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Leadership Convocation Focuses on Building Communities of Transformation

by Kathy Clark

Participants in the Leadership Convocation at Piedmont College were treated to two very gifted speakers who explored what it means to build communities of transformation from two different perspectives. The event was held prior to the Annual Meeting of the Southeast Conference on Friday, June 11.

Dr. Deborah Krause, Associate Professor of New Testament Studies at Eden Theological Seminary, began by exploring the foundations upon which we are called to build communities of faith in our own time. In a lively and provocative presentation, Dr. Krause noted that the recently released film, *The Passion of the Christ*, and the best selling novel, *The DaVinci Code*, are two cultural phenomena in a theological tension with one another over questions about the origins and foundation of the Christian faith. Likewise, the evangelist Luke and the

apostle Paul also present two very different origin stories as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles that are also in tension with one another.

Dr. Krause reminded participants that every community has an origin story and that the Christian Church in fact has many different origin stories that were as diverse as the communities we encounter throughout the New Testament. Diversity, according to Dr. Krause, has been part of the Christian experience from its very beginnings, and is a mark of the church today. Part of the challenge of being a church that honors diversity is learning to live creatively in the tension that diversity presents. The popularity and controversy sparked by popular film and literature are opportunities for us to re-examine our own roots and the fundamental values that underlie our foundations and energize the living out of our vocations as diverse communities of transformation.

Dr. Ron Baard, Associate Professor of Mentored Practice of Bangor Theological Seminary, invited participants to explore what it means to be communities of transformation from a pastoral care perspective. In considering the idea that the church is the Beloved Community, members are challenged to ask who is in the community and who is yet on the fringes? Who needs to be drawn in more fully and whom does the community need in order to be more fully alive in Christ?

In a thoughtful and thought provoking conversation, participants examined the responses of their own congregations to four groups of vulnerable people – victims of domestic violence, those suffering from mental illness, those struggling with addiction and substance abuse issues, and older adults – and shared congregational initiatives to engender greater awareness, responsiveness and inclusion of these brothers and sisters in Christ in our communities. Dr. Baard invited those present

to reflect intentionally upon what it means to be communities of transformation where ministry is not only about teaching and preaching, but also about healing, where our paradigms are shifting from a vision of the church as offering redemption in response to guilt, to one that sees the church as offering blessing in response to shame.

Over 60 people from throughout the Southeast Conference participated in the Leadership Convocation which provided an excellent opportunity to engage the theme of the Annual meeting, *The People have a Mind to Build: Building Communities of Transformation*.

Kathy Clark is Associate Conference Minister for the Southeast Conference and Director of the Theology Among the People (TAP) program. She may be contacted at kclark@secucc.org.

TAP Convocation Challenges Participants to Build Communities that Transform Social, Political and Economic Structures

by Kathy Clark

In a gathering that has now become a tradition, participants, graduates, facilitators and friends of the Theology Among the People (TAP) program met on Thursday evening before the Southeast Conference Annual Meeting for a dinner and convocation. This year's event featured as keynote speaker Dr. Noel Erskine, Associate Professor of Theology and Ethics of the Candler School of Theology of Emory University. Erskine introduced the theme of the Annual Meeting, "The People Have a Mind to Build: Building Communities of Transformation" by focusing our attention on the work and witness of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and what it means to build the beloved community today.

Author of a seminal book on the theology of Dr. King entitled *King among the Theologians*, Dr. Erskine reminded his listeners of the principle of love at the center of non-violence, a principle that recognizes and honors the *Imago Dei*, the image of God, in everyone and calls for active resistance to the forces of evil, and not to persons (oppressors and oppressed alike) who have been victimized by evil. What keeps the beloved community alive today, Erskine challenged, is love that leads to justice, trust that God participates

in the struggles of God's people, and hope that good will eventually triumph over evil. Christians are called to participate in this revolution of values that underlies the revolution of social and economic systems that perpetrate oppression.

Following Dr. Erskine's presentation, Rev. Joyce Hollyday, Associate Conference Minister and Co-Director of the Rekindle the Gift project, and Rev. Bennie Liggins, Associate Conference Minister and pastor of Community Congregational UCC in Montgomery, Alabama, responded by reminding listeners of the historical and present-day connections of the Southeast Conference to the Civil Rights Movement and to Dr. King. The evening was enriching and inspiring, reminding those present of how far we have come and how far we have yet to go in building communities that transform social, political and economic structures where all know that they are truly beloved of God.

Kathy Clark is Associate Conference Minister for the Southeast Conference and Director of the Theology Among the People (TAP) program. She may be contacted at kclark@secucc.org.

National Leader to Provide Keynote for Women's Retreat

The Rev. Rosemary McCombs Maxey, a national leader in the United Church of Christ and a member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation of Oklahoma, will be the keynote speaker for the Southeast Conference 2004 Women's Retreat on October 29-31. She has been Co-Chairperson of the UCC Council on Racial Ethnic Ministries, and she is currently editor of *Mosaic*, a UCC Women's publication. She is a recipient of the Antoinette Brown Award for Outstanding Ministry and the Just Peace Award.

Rev. Maxey has served as Interim Executive Director of the UCC Council for American Indian Ministry (AIM), and she is currently Acting Director of the Eagle Butte Learning Center, a ministry of AIM. She also works actively to preserve the culture and language of her Creek Nation and currently is Secretary of the Board of Directors of the Dustin Indian Center.

The theme of the Southeast Conference Women's Retreat is "Women in the World: Called as Peacemakers," focusing on the scriptural text of Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Rev. Maxey's presentations and the workshops will focus on peacemaking within ourselves, in our homes and communities, and in the world. In addition to the keynote, attendees can choose from several challenging workshops.

UCC women and their friends are invited to this event at Sumatanga, a Methodist conference center off I-59



northeast of Birmingham, Alabama (near Gadsden). Registration is \$95.00 each for two people per room; \$133.00 for a single room. This covers two nights lodging and five meals in addition to the registration. Registration is due by October 8. For registration forms and additional information, contact the Chair for Women in Church and Society in your association:

ALA/TENN
Celesta Bridgeforth - 256/232-6381
Janell Landis - 931/277-5478

EAL/WGA
Lena Dollar - 334/642-0084

GA/SC
Dr. Erna Bryant - 770/493-1930



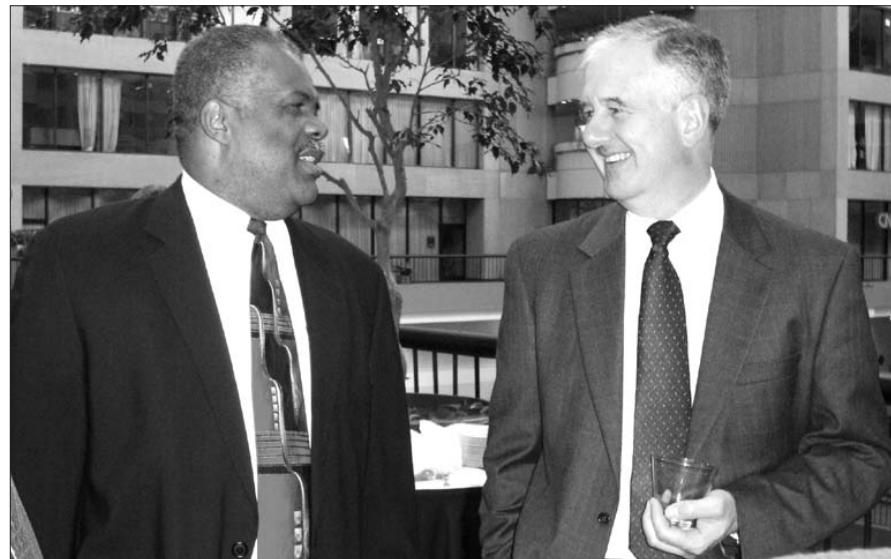
Covenanted Ministries Boards Meet in Atlanta

A joint meeting of the Boards of Directors of the Covenanted Ministries of the United Church of Christ met in Atlanta on April 22 – 25 at the Omni Hotel. The gathering brought together board members from throughout the United States, including several members of the Southeast Conference, to address issues concerning the national church. Among the items on the agenda was an evaluation of the restructuring of the national office in 2001 which collapsed 12 autonomous units into four Covenanted Ministries and one each Associated and Affiliated Ministries: Local Church Ministries, Wider Church Ministries, Justice and Witness Ministries, the Office of General Ministries, the United Church Foundation and the Pension Boards. These entities are charged with oversight

of the mission of the national church.

On Friday evening, the Board of Directors of the Southeast Conference, which met at the same time at First Congregational UCC in Atlanta, joined the participants in the joint boards meeting for a vesper service, prepared and led by members of the Southeast Conference. Rev. Timothy Downs welcomed the national gathering to Atlanta, and, along with Rev. Joyce Hollyday and Pastor and Board Member Milton Hurst, led the service. Rev. Susan Mitchell, co-pastor of Sankofa UCC in Atlanta, offered praise through liturgical dance. Music was provided by Rev. Maureen Jenci-Shelton and Ms. Jill Hendrix of Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta.

On Sunday morning, members of the joint boards attended worship at a num-



Rev. Bennie Liggins, Associate Conference Minister, (L) greets UCC President John Thomas during his recent visit to Atlanta.

ber of UCC churches within the Atlanta area, where they were received with genuine Southern and Southeast Conference hospitality. The joint meeting provided the opportunity for the national staff and planning committee to get a “foretaste” of

the site of the next General Synod. By all accounts, the gathering was a great success, and those in attendance are looking forward to coming back to Atlanta for the bi-annual gathering of the whole church in 2005.

East Alabama/West Georgia Association Churches Explore Issues of Renewal

Scattered across East Alabama and West Georgia are a handful of United Church of Christ congregations striving to be faithful in a different and difficult context. On May 22 - 23, 2004, pastors and lay leaders from all ten of these congregations gathered under the leadership of Rev. Steve Gifford, a leading authority in church renewal in the United Church of Christ. On Saturday, the ministers of these congregations gathered at Lanett Congregational Christian Church to share the joys and frustrations of being a family size church in these days. Attendees reported that worship attendance in their congregations ranges from five to 70, with an average of about 35 parishioners.

Pastors and church leaders are feeling that the world is changing around their churches and it's not clear how to sustain

a ministry in light of these changes. One pastor said, “We’re depressed and we don’t know where to turn.” Rev. Gifford reminded participants that much of the ministry in this kind of setting is like grief management. The group spoke about the dynamic of rising resistance in the face of change within the life of a church.

Rev. Gifford pointed out that several decades ago a congregation as small as 60 to 70 members could support a full-time ministry, whereas today a church must have a membership of 150 to afford full time staff. The group concluded that there is a need for the kinds of ministries that can be offered by churches of the United Church of Christ in this setting. We are “different” – there is a quality of grace that tends to mark our congregational life that is sometimes absent in the larger culture. We can be a redemptive and inclusive community.

On Sunday, over 60 association church members gathered at North Main Congregational Christian Church, UCC, in Roanoke, AL for a potluck lunch and conversation concerning the changing context in which we do ministry and the particular challenges of being a congregation in today’s world. “The marks of effective pastoral ministry are effective pastoral care, strong training for lay leadership, and graceful openhearted preaching



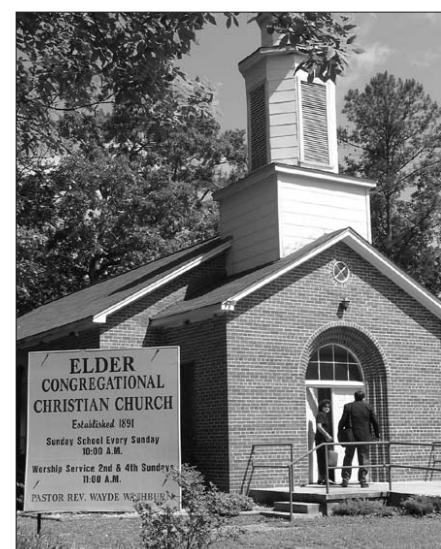
and worship,” stated Rev. Gifford.

He noted that biological growth, the old ways of growing church by having children, no longer work for today’s families and today’s demographics. Instead, people who come to church have often experienced a major life transition within the last two years. After turning to self-help books and the Internet, they may then begin to visit churches. If the church is warm without being overwhelming, graceful and not judging, they may gradually begin to ease their way into church life.

Rev. Gifford pointed out that outreach comes first in the life of the church and growth is a byproduct of that outreach. People know when they are being “sold” and tend to resist. It is important for a church to find the one thing that it does with excellence. People report that they want to “feel” God in worship. Small churches are the right size for this experience. They can be warm, welcoming communities that support people through the challenges of life’s journey. A primary



The Renewal Weekend provided an opportunity for pastors and lay leaders from many small congregations to form friendships and share resources.



challenge for churches that have historically been supported by one or several families is allowing themselves to be open to persons outside the family system. Such churches can easily remain closed to others.

The Executive Committee of the East Alabama/West Georgia Association is preparing follow-up meetings to help churches build on this beginning of their journey to renewal.

Pointers for a Growing Church

- The church needs to be in prayer. The foundation of church renewal is prayer to prepare us to face the changes that we must face.
- All change involves grief and loss. Because change involves grief, a church needs to prepare to empathetically support those who are grieving.
- The congregation needs to find the one thing that they do well and seek to do it.
- The church needs to have in place tools of evaluation as they undertake more effective ministries.

Youth Happenings

Annual Meeting Integrates Activities for Youth, Children and Parents

by Betsy Taylor Flory

Stewart Hall at Piedmont College was brimming with UCC energy last weekend. Adults gathered for leadership convocation classes in several rooms. In another small room, children and their parents played in the sand and told a bible story. In yet another room, middle and high school youth, their parents and youth leaders gathered to learn about the cultural history of adolescence.

For younger children and their parents, Mileta Neely led a bible story modeled on the Godly Play series in which both children and their parents participated. When the bible story and art-based responses were over, kids went outside to play with chaperones and Ms. Neely led a discussion with parents on ways to foster faith and spirituality at home, using the principles practiced in the bible story presentation.

Elsewhere, David White, an assistant visiting professor at Candler led an eye-opening presentation on the "creation" of adolescence. Believe it or not, the practice of living "in-between" adulthood and childhood for a number of years is a new one that has significant consequences for all of us, growing and grown alike. Dr. White's presentation was followed by a viewing of the

Merchants of Cool, a video offering a sobering look at the ways teen culture has been



Betsy Taylor Flory, Coordinator of Youth Ministries, welcomes youth to Southeast Conference Annual Meeting.



Children and their parents enjoyed an inter-generational workshop together.

cynically co-opted, mass-produced and marketed by corporations in search of a profit. Both portions of the session were thought provoking and unsettling, leaving the participants with lots of questions.

In response to the "merchants of cool" and their theft of teen culture, young people were invited into a gathering led by Candler student Julie Mavity where they learned ways to make themselves heard in their churches, schools and communities. The young people were deeply engaged in the discussions and brainstorming. One young man was heard to comment, "The first session was cool, the second session was fun!"

The day was capped off by a cross-cultural excursion into the world of contra-dancing! All of the young people, from the very smallest 2-year-old, Abigail, to the very tallest young man, Marvin, took a whirl to live music, and adapted the time-honored moves of the dance with up-to-the-minute improvisations of their own. In spite of the formidable heat in the gymnasium, there were grins all around. We thank Piedmont College for arranging this great evening fellowship!

Betsy Taylor Flory is the Coordinator of Youth Ministries for the Southeast Conference and may be contacted at BTFlory@aol.com.

Conference Youth Participate in Service Project

On Saturday morning of the Southeast Conference Annual Meeting, youth gathered once again this year for a mission service project. They cleared out two buildings belonging to the local theatre company so that renovations and accessibility upgrades can be made in the buildings. The staff of the theatre company was greatly pleased by the help for they accomplished in a morning what it may have taken them weeks to do on their own. Best of all, as wardrobe rooms were emptied out, youth workers were invited to choose costumes to take home with them. A Darth Vader look-alike, among others, moved furniture and hauled trash out of the theatre!



Cindy Peterson of Piedmont College assists Conference youth in a mission service project.

Pilot Program Underway for Youth Ministry Leadership Training

by Betsy Taylor Flory

The Southeast Conference is participating in a pilot program developed in collaboration with Youth Theological Initiative at Candler School of Theology of Emory University designed for training lay and ordained adults who work with youth. A group of ten participants, from six churches in three states, gathers regularly about every two months for an evening of fellowship and small projects and a full day of training on various subjects. The group is about equally divided between lay and ordained people, but it is

entirely comprised of women. Take note men – next time around we hope to see this change!

We spent a weekend exploring our images of God and the ways those images shape our theology, taking time to reflect on which images of God are most important to us to pass on to our young people. We then spent a weekend learning about our different personality types and how those personality types affect the ways we teach kids and interact with other adults with whom we work. Each time we meet, we work to integrate the topics from the

previous sessions into our new topic.

In the day preceding the annual meeting this year, our class met with David White, associate visiting professor at Candler and the person who first approached the Conference about creating the pilot program. David White offered a fascinating presentation on the cultural history of adolescence and the strong ties the current North American form of "teenhood" has to marketing and consumerism. His presentation noted for us some of the most pressing issues of working with teens – their lack of relationships with adults, their lack of meaningful work or a sense of purpose, and their lack of integration into the broader community in ways that help them secure a sense of identity. This isolation makes teens more vulnerable to "idols" like consumerism and materialism, and less able to withstand the rigors of peer pressure, depression and loneliness.

This information made us think hard. There were a number of lively discussions about our own teen years as well as our experiences with our own youth groups.

The following morning, after our own grown-up "lock-in", the group was assigned to create a lesson plan for use in a middle school setting as a means of integrating the materials they had been presented in the first three sessions. At first it was an intimidating task, sorting through the information we had been given to create an inventory of the skills, gifts and ideas needed to create the plan for our composite youth group. But as people got engaged, the discussion grew livelier and livelier. People discovered that they had a lot more to bring to the process than they thought. We created a really interesting set of lesson plans and came away with a much clearer sense of what it is we seek to do, week after week, in the youth group.

We all look forward to our next session, when we will learn the basics of teaching. In months to come we will tackle such topics as worship, boundaries, self-care and more.

Betsy Taylor Flory is the Coordinator of Youth Ministries for the Southeast Conference and may be contacted at BTFlory@aol.com.





Southeast Feast

Food for the Heart and Soul



A Bold and Faithful Legacy

by Joyce Hollyday

As a young woman, Mrs. Faustina W. Jones, a member of First Congregational United Church of Christ in Montgomery, Alabama, worked as a librarian at Alabama State University. She remembers the young new pastor at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church showing up at the back door occasionally with batches of papers, which Mrs. Jones' library colleague received and carried in the trunk of her car. "We didn't talk about it too much," Mrs. Jones said. "I knew something was happening."

"Something" was indeed happening! Those papers contained information on strategies and leadership for the Civil Rights Movement, which was about to spread from Montgomery's buses, streets, and lunch counters to every corner of the South. When young Martin Luther King, Jr. appeared largely unnoticed at the library, Mrs. Jones had no idea the role he would play. He just seemed to appear out of nowhere.

Those of us who attended the TAP (Theology Among the People) convocation before the Southeast Conference Annual Meeting were blessed and inspired by Dr. Noel Erskine's portrait of Dr. King and the beloved community. Clearly, Dr. King and the Movement didn't just appear out of nowhere. And we in the Southeast Conference can be proud of a heritage that includes some of the groundwork that made the Movement possible.

In 1988, when Jesse Jackson was a candidate for president, Cleo Fields, a 25-year-old state senator from Louisiana, addressed the Democratic National Convention and offered this quote: "Booker T. Washington started to teach so Rosa Parks could take her seat. Rosa Parks took her seat so Fannie Lou Hamer could take her stand. Fannie Lou Hamer took her stand so Martin Luther King, Jr., could march. Martin Luther King marched so Jesse Jackson could run." Every social movement contains seeds from previous generations and is carried on the shoulders of the courageous individuals who made a path for those who would come later.

When did the Civil Rights Movement begin? Some might say it began more than two centuries ago on St. Simons Island, when a group of Africans from the Ibo tribe of southern Nigeria refused to be enslaved. As they disembarked from a slave ship, still chained to one another, they grasped hands, turned, and walked into the ocean, chanting, "The sea brought us, and the sea will bring us home."

Others might argue that it started in 1839, when captives on board the *Amistad* grasped control of the ship and their freedom. Congregationalists came to their aid, forming the Amistad Committee, raising money for their legal defense and their return to Africa. From that small committee grew the American Missionary Association (AMA), the largest, most organized, and most integrated abolitionist and educational organization in the 1800's.

Or perhaps the Civil Rights Movement began with Cleo Fields' starting point—when Booker T. Washington walked many miles to attend the AMA-founded

Hampton Institute, and then went on to start the Tuskegee Institute. Hampton Institute grew from the very first AMA school, begun by Mary Peake for fugitives from slavery who found refuge behind Union lines at Fortress Monroe during the Civil War. This is our proud legacy in the United Church of Christ and the Southeast Conference.

When Rev. Susan Mitchell and I visited Dorchester Academy in Midway, Georgia, to collect stories for Rekindle the Gift, the Southeast Conference ministry that celebrates our American Missionary Association heritage, we learned of its long history of courage and faithfulness. It began as an elementary school in 1868 and evolved into the Dorchester Cooperative Center during the Depression, with a credit union, a health clinic, and aid for area farmers. Its assembly room was used for mass meetings that drew up to 800 people preparing to exercise their right to vote. A hand-drawn flier from that era titled "The \$64 Question" portrayed a man down on one knee asking a woman, "Have you registered?"

When Rev. Andrew Young was looking for a site to locate the citizenship education program in 1961, he chose Dorchester Academy. Citing the bold history of AMA education, and the strong support of the United Church of Christ, Rev. Young called the academy a "repository of memories of the kind of hopes and aspirations we planned to revive through citizenship schools."

Fannie Lou Hamer, a tireless Mississippi Civil Rights leader whose rendition of "This Little Light of Mine" inspired courage at many marches and demonstrations, was just one of many pupils emboldened by their education at Dorchester. Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon came to Dorchester, having been expelled from Georgia's Albany State College for her Civil Rights activities, and went on to found the renowned a cappella women's singing group Sweet Honey in the Rock. Septima Clark came to teach after losing her public teaching position in South Carolina, for refusing to renounce her membership in the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People).

Beverly Lewis Gross, who grew up in Midway Congregational United Church of Christ, was a teenager when Civil Rights leaders began appearing at Dorchester and inspired her to act. She sat by herself on the steps of Clyde & Betty's, a segregated coffee shop. The owner threatened her with a shotgun and a German shepherd, then called for the county's combination ambulance-and-hearse to pull up. But she never wavered.

Dorchester Academy, which dedicated its new museum the weekend after our Annual Meeting, is just one of our AMA-founded institutions with a courageous witness that has spanned centuries. Similar stories could be told from all across the Southeast Conference. Let us rejoice that we share together in this bold and faithful legacy.

Joyce Hollyday is Associate Conference Minister for the Southeast Conference and may be contacted at jhollyday@bellsouth.net.

CONFERENCE CALENDAR

AUGUST 5-7

UCC National Evangelism Event
Hilton Atlanta Airport Hotel, Atlanta, GA
For information, visit www.ucc.org/evangelism.

AUGUST 9-11

Southeast Conference Annual Staff Retreat
Bryson City, NC

AUGUST 13-16

UCC Musicians Network Annual Conference
"Worshiping into God's Future"
Cleveland, OH
For information, email nagyk@ucc.org.

AUGUST 14

Georgia South Carolina Association Church and Ministry Committee Meeting
Location to be Announced

AUGUST 20-21

Youth Leadership Training Event
Pilgrimage UCC, Marietta, GA

AUGUST 27

Ala-Tenn Church and Ministry Committee Meeting
Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC,
Chattanooga, TN

AUGUST 29

TAP Facilitators Training
Atlanta, GA

AUGUST 29

Mission Statement Workshop
Howard Congregational UCC, Nashville, TN

AUGUST 30

Northeast Tennessee UCC Clergy Gathering
Pleasant Hill Community Church, UCC, Pleasant Hill, TN

SEPTEMBER 17-18

Georgia South Carolina Association Annual Meeting
Church of the Savior, Roswell, GA

OCTOBER 22-23

Southeast Conference Board of Directors' Retreat
Simpsonwood Retreat Center, Norcross, GA

OCTOBER 29-31

Southeast Conference UCC Women's Retreat
Sumatanga Conference Center, Near Gadsden, AL

Olivia White Installed as Executive Minister for Wider Church Ministries

Service Held at Atlanta's First Congregational Church

During the meeting of the Covenanted Ministries of the United Church of Christ, Olivia White was installed as the newly elected Executive Minister of the Covenanted Ministry, Wider Church Ministries, at a service on April 24, 2004 at the First Congregational Church in Atlanta, GA. Music was provided by the Atlanta Jazz Chorus and the Praise Team of First United Church of Christ in Sweetwater, TN, among others. Bernice Powell Jackson, the Executive Minister of the Covenanted Ministry, Justice and Witness Ministries, was preacher for the service. The Southeast Conference and First Congregational Church were proud to serve as hosts for this inspirational celebration of the ministries of the UCC and the global ministries of our denomination.